

Few things are more commonplace, necessary — and underfoot - on a farm than cats.

FAMILY FARM ORGANIZATION.

two, few have only a cat or two. Cats — being cats — tend to perpetuate themselves with reliable While most farms have a dog or regularity. Our populaton over the

years has ranged from lows of three or four to a one-time high of 30-plus, which was absolutely too many. Mostly, we hover in the range of 10 to a dozen, scattered among the barns and bales. And underfoot.

Over the years, we have been rather discriminating about the color of our cats. Partial to black. black and white and gray-black tigers (perhaps because of the heavy Holstein-color influence in our lives), we have long-standing bloodlines of "Holstein" felines.

What we have not had over the years are the orange "Morris The Cat" types. As a youngster, The Farmer lost a batch of 4-H baby chicks to a big, orange tomcat,

which skewed his appreciation for Morris clones.

But inbreeding of our black and white cats eventually resulted in a generation that was more frail than their ancestors, with apparent reproductive problems. Down to one mother cat about two years ago, we found our cat numbers diminishing.

Then we began seeing a robust, orange-furred visitor streaking out of distant corners of the barn when we entered. And, sure enough, the next kittens born were multi-hued calicos. Another line with golden tint arrived with the donation from a friend of a striped gray tiger with sunny undertones — and orange siblings.

This spring's kitten litter brought us a mottled assortment, including a handsome orange and white male and a gentle, creamcolored female I dubbed Creme. Soon after, an apparentlyhomeless but friendly, darkyellow fellow moved in off the street. Plus, we adopted a chubby, beautifully-marked dark tiger named Zebo. (Short for Zebra.)

Zebo snuggled up against my neck, purred with a passion and turned up at every corner while I did barn chores. He's identical to a tiger-striped Butch the kids loved years ago, so it was natural to just call him Butch.

Once again we have a plentiful supply of cats. Underfoot.

'round my feet for milk just this morning - cats of all colors. Kittens scamper back into the haymow when you enter the bank barn — including a long-haired yellow and a long-haired gray. A dormant, long-haired bloodline has apparently resurfaced in our cat genetics.

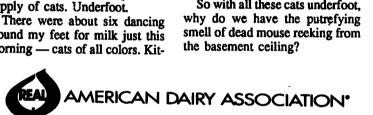
Pest, the overly-friendly gray and white male, has taken to sleeping in the barrel of sawdust in the calf nursery. Foxy, our old, long-haired, dairy-barn cat, spends most of his time curled up in the utility room, warmed by the motors and compressors of our milking/cooling systems.

Butch is everywhere. With his head stuck in a bucket of fresh milk. In the calves' feed trough, sharing their sweet feed. Curled up in hayracks in cozy nests of dry grass and alfalfa.

We find cat prints on papers on the barn office desk and cats perched atop the feed racks in the heifer pens. Cats curled in tight balls in the haymow of calf alfalfa. Cats basking in the morning sunshine that floods into the southfacing, outside calf condos.

And a cat rattling the back storm door. I put the housecat outside and forgot to let her back in immediately. Her outside maximum time in cold weather is under two minutes. So she rattles the door with her paw and grumbles indignantly when I finally respond.

So with all these cats underfoot,



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